

Testimony of State Representative Mike Carroll

Committee on Children and Youth  
Pennsylvania House of Representatives

House Bill 1482

September 27, 2007

I wish to thank the members of the Children and Youth Committee and Madam Chair Bishop for your interest in this matter and for taking time to conduct this hearing.

I am the father of three young children. A son, age 12 and two daughters ages 10 and 8. My son began playing baseball at age 5 in tee ball and continued through this year in Little League. My daughters play girls softball. I have served my local Little League as a head coach for six year and two additional years as an assistant coach – my son's entire playing career. Prior to that, I served my local Little League as an assistant and head coach dating back to the 1980s.

My experiences, especially the past 8 years as my son's coach, were one of my life's greatest joys. I firmly believe all children, both boys and girls, benefit greatly from participation in team sports and from baseball or softball in particular. In addition, I am a product of Little League, as is my father, and encourage every child to participate.

As I watched my son's games this year, I became extremely alarmed with a playing condition I believed was being created by the bats used by the players. Each team we would play, as well as our own team, had one or two players who had above average to exceptional talent. In my view, this talent combined with a very expensive, metal bat created a situation whereby a batted ball hit toward the pitcher traveled too fast for a defensive reaction by the pitcher. I actually found myself hoping the opposing team would intentionally walk our team's most talented player so as to avoid the possibility of his injuring the opposing team's pitcher.

Thankfully, I did not witness any such injury.

Considering the possibility the metal bats may be creating an unsafe condition, I examined every document I could find on the subject of metal bats. Suffice to say, there have been numerous studies on metal bats with each attempting to measure their performance. The most often cited statistic in these studies is the exit speed of the ball off the bat. I'm certain other presenters today will highlight these statistics for you and attempt to document how today's metal bats perform as a wood bat. I am not convinced.

Metal bats have evolved over time and some steps have been taken by manufactures, likely in response to league demands, to make them safer than they were in the past. Despite this, not all metal bats are the same. The use of metal bats is regulated on a league by league basis and the mere fact that leagues regulate metal bats is cause for concern.

Metal bats come in a variety of lengths, weights, composites, and a measurement called "performance factor." For example, PIAA and NCAA limit the weight length ratio to a minus 3. Therefore a 30 inch bat cannot weigh any less than 27 ounces. Many youth leagues have no such limit. In fact, in my son's league, most players on his team use bats that range from minus 9 to minus 13. This means a 30 inch bat can weigh as little as 17 ounces.

Other limitations imposed by leagues target the bat performance factor. This factor or ratio, attempts to compare the performance of a metal bat with the performance of a wood bat. Beginning in 2009, Little League will require all metal bats to comply with a 1.15 BPF. If bat manufacturers made the change to a 1.15 BPF as in the early 1990s as Little League claims, why wait until 2009 to impose this restriction? Other leagues have a lengthy list of non-approved metal bats.

My analysis of the studies combined with my years of experience did not allay my concerns that the bats used today in youth baseball leagues are unsafe.

Metal bats are marketed as having "larger sweet spots, a trampoline effects, more pop and better overall performance." Their product is intended to hit the ball harder, faster and travel farther to give the player using the bat an advantage. I suspect bat manufacturers will continue to enhance their products yearly to outperform their competition or even last year's model. Leagues in turn will be faced with determining the effect bats have on players and the game. In the meantime, young players keep playing with constantly evolving equipment.

My personal experience with metal bats is the product of my time served as a Little League volunteer. I'm not a physicist and will not attempt to justify any scientific data to support this legislation. I share the same view as that of John Franco, a 22 year Major League Baseball pitcher who testified in New York about his experience with metal bats used by high school players, "while the ball is getting out of my hand, it's already hitting the net, and I don't even see it coming at me. It's dangerous. It's very, very dangerous....I'm speaking from someone who is standing on the mound for 22 years and I can see the difference."

I introduced this bill to ensure we had a discussion in our state about metal bats. I foresee the day when a player is tragically injured or killed and citizens will ask if metal bats are safe. I was hopeful the bill's introduction would spur that conversation before any tragedy. Judging from the interest in the subject, I believe the discussion is underway.

I have heard the complaints from some who say metal bats save money or that our child will be at a disadvantage if not allowed to continue their use. The same arguments were used in other jurisdictions that have taken action to limit the use of metal bats, notably New York City and the State of North Dakota. I believe safety concerns trump all others when it comes to our state's children.

Finally, to those who say we have more pressing issues to consider in Pennsylvania, I say there is no limit to the number of measures we can consider this session. As United States District Judge John G. Koeltl noted in his decision, "In short, the judgment that high school players' safety is more important than higher batting averages and more offense is a classic legislative judgment that the city council could constitutionally make." I believe we in Pennsylvania need to consider the player's safety and take appropriate steps to ensure children are not being subjected to unsafe conditions.

Outside of any action this committee may take, I call on all youth leagues to carefully examine the types of bats that are allowed to be used and take every precaution to protect their players from an injury that could be avoided.

I thank the committee for their time and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.